

Chapter IV

LAND USE

INTRODUCTION

Information regarding historic and existing land use and land use development patterns is essential to any sound comprehensive planning effort. This chapter presents the findings of the land use inventories and analyses conducted in support of the preparation of the Waukesha County development plan. Specifically, this chapter describes historic urban growth within the County; describes the existing land use base and changes in that base over the past three decades; and presents more detailed analyses of certain major land use categories, including residential, commercial, industrial, governmental and institutional, agricultural, and extractive land use, within the County.

HISTORIC URBAN GROWTH

Overview

The historic development of Waukesha County, as identified under the Regional Planning Commission's urban growth analysis, is shown on Map 31.¹ Early settlements were established in this County following completion of the U. S. Public Land Survey in 1836. In 1850, urban development was largely confined to settlements within the now incorporated places of Big Bend, Eagle, Hartland, Menomonee Falls, Merton, Mukwonago, Oconomowoc, Pewaukee, and Waukesha. The City of Waukesha was the largest urban center in 1900. The first half of the 20th century saw additional development around many of these original settlements; the development of settlements in Butler, Dousman, and Wales; and residential and recreational development around many of the County's lakes. Suburban development in the easternmost portion of the County was just starting to materialize by 1950.

The pace of urban development within the County accelerated after 1950 and has remained rapid since. The 40-year period from 1950 to 1990 saw significant development in the eastern tier of communities in the County, essentially as an expansion of the Milwaukee metropolitan area, and continued development in and around the City of Waukesha and other established outlying urban centers. In addition, this period saw a proliferation of scattered

urban enclaves in many areas of the County far removed from the historic urban centers, particularly after 1963.

The historic increase in the urban land area of the County is quantitatively summarized in Table 41. The accelerated rate of urban development since 1950 is evident in this table. During the 50-year period from 1900 to 1950, the conversion of land to urban use occurred at an average annual rate of 0.3 square miles per year. Since 1950, urban development has occurred at an average annual rate of 3.2

¹Information regarding historic and existing land use presented in this chapter is based on two types of inventories and analyses, an urban growth analysis and a land use inventory, utilized by the Regional Planning Commission in order to monitor urban growth and development in Southeastern Wisconsin. Under the urban growth analysis, which is presented for the County on Map 31, urban development is defined as those areas where houses or other buildings have been constructed in relatively compact groups or where a closely spaced network of minor streets has been constructed, thus indicating a concentration of residential, commercial, industrial, or other urban uses; the growth areas include concentrations of land committed to urban use as well as any open space areas within such urban areas which are proposed to be preserved for resource conservation purposes. Under the land use inventory, which is presented for the County on Map 32, urban land use is defined to include all residential, commercial, industrial, governmental, intensive recreational, and transportation development wherever located. In contrast to the urban growth analysis, which is intended to identify the limits or boundaries of concentration of urban land uses, the land use inventory is a precise land cover inventory, which identifies all land developed for and actually in urban use, regardless of location. The areal extent of the urban concentrations identified under the urban growth analysis and shown on Map 31 is approximately 16 percent less than the area of the urban land uses identified under the land use inventory and shown on Map 32.